

ALL THESE THINGS—A SERMON WITH THREE TEXTS NO. 837

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 18, 1868,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have you bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.”
Genesis 42:36.*

THE patriarch must needs use the expression, “ALL THESE THINGS.” He had gone through the catalog, there were but three items at the most, and yet nothing narrower than, “All these things are against me” will suit him. Our notation of our trials is very apt to present them in exaggerated number, but when we come to count our mercies, as a usual rule our tendency is to diminish them. We magnify the hosts of our troubles and underestimate the armies of our benefits. It were well if it were not so, for the habit is most painful to ourselves and dishonorable to God. “All these things,” indeed!

And what a little “all” compared with the benefits of God! What an insignificant “all” compared with the sufferings of our covenant Head! What a trifling “all” compared with the amazing weight of glory which shall soon be revealed in us! However, allowing the timorous expression to stand, it shall be my business this morning to show that while, according to the verdict of unbelief, “all these things are against us,” yet there are other lights in which to look upon the multitude of our griefs—lights which shall enable us to perceive their benefit to us, and even to triumph in them through Him that loved us.

I. Our first text is THE EXCLAMATION OF UNBELIEF, “All these things are against me.”

In Jacob’s case it was *a very plausible verdict*. Joseph he had long lost sight of, Simeon did not return from the journey into Egypt, his sons now requested that Benjamin might be entrusted to their thriftless care, and it might well appear to the anxious father as if one by one his children were sinking into untimely graves, and that God was dealing severely with him. Even the insinuation by which he ascribed these bereavements to the malice or carelessness of his sons, “Me have you bereaved of my children,” had an air of great likelihood thrown around it. Yet plausible as was the old man’s mournful conclusion, it was not correct, and therefore let us learn to forbear rash judgment, and never in any case conclude against the faithfulness of the Lord. There may be peculiarities in our case which look as if the Master had treated us with the harshness of a cruel one. There may be thorns of unusual sharpness in our pillow, but we must not dream that anger placed them there.

We may be pining under a grief which we could not tell into another’s ear, but which makes our lot appeared to be singled out and separated for peculiar misery, and hence it may seem just to conclude, “God has forsaken me; he has turned upon me in his fierce anger, and his loving-kindnesses have failed forevermore,” but rest assured, my brethren, that the most plausible is not always the most true, and the most natural is not the most sure. God is and ever must be love to His people, let nothing disturb you in this belief, believe not the clearest inferences from His providence, but believe Him, let outward circumstances say what they may.

Even if your understanding should lead you to doubt the Lord, remember that God is greater than your understanding, that His ways are past finding out, and in the end His dispensations must prove to be wise, loving, and gracious. Yet I can well imagine that souls in distress feel it almost ungenerous to dispute the verdict at which they have arrived, for the evidence appears to be so multiplied and clear. Sitting alone, silent in your sorrow, crushed out of all hope, you claim the unhappy right to declare, “All these things are against me,” and yet, beloved, it is not so.

Jacob's exclamation was *most evidently exaggerated*—exaggerated in the term he used, “All these things,” for there were but three evils at the most, exaggerated, too, in most of his statements. He said, “Simeon is not.” Now, his sons had told him that the ruler of the land of Egypt had taken Simeon and bound him before their eyes, but they gave him no reason to believe that Simeon was put to death. The old man jumps to a conclusion for which he has no warrant, and laments because “Simeon is not.”

He added, “You would take Benjamin away.” Yes, but only to go into Egypt to buy corn, a short and needed journey from which he would soon return. You would suppose, from the patriarch's language, that beyond all doubt, Simeon had fallen a victim in Egypt, and that Benjamin was demanded with a view to his instant execution, but where was evidence to support this assertion? We frequently talk of our sorrows in language larger than the truth would warrant. We write ourselves down as peers in the realms of misery, whereas we do but bear the common burdens of ordinary men. We dream that no others have ever passed along our rugged path, whereas the road is hard with the footsteps of the flock. We imagine that the furnace has been heated seven times hotter for us, whereas, compared with martyrs, and the afflicted in all ages, and especially compared with our Master, it is probable that our griefs are of the lighter kind.

The exclamation of Jacob was also as bitter as it was exaggerated. It lead him to make a speech which (however accidentally true), with his information as to his sons, was ungenerous, and even worse. He said, “Me *you* have bereaved of my children.” Now, if he really believed that Joseph was torn of beasts, as he appears to have done, he had no right to assail the brethren with a charge of murder, for it was little else.

In the case of Simeon, the brethren were perfectly innocent, they had nothing whatever to do with Simeon's being bound, it was wrong to accuse them so harshly. In the taking away of Benjamin, though there may have been a jealousy against him as aforetime against Joseph, yet most certainly the brethren were not to blame. They told their father most correctly the message which the lord of Egypt had sent to him. It was Joseph who had said, “If you bring not your younger brother with you, by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not see my face again.” That was no invention of theirs, and it was unjust on the part of the old patriarch to cast over his sons, who probably loved him much, and were anxious for his welfare, an accusation little short of a charge of triple murder. “Me *you* have bereaved of my children.”

Oh, cruel words! Brethren, when our griefs are heavy, we are apt to accuse our fellows, to be wrath with the secondary causes of our suffering, and to say things which ought not to be said by the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. A dog will bite the stick with which you strike him, but if he had sense he would see how little the secondary cause has to do with it, and so we oftentimes are provoked against the person through whom we are troubled, whereas, after all, the rod is wielded by the hand of God, and there is the true source of affliction.

If you drink of the river of affliction near its outfall, it is brackish and offensive to the taste, but if you will trace it to its source, where it rises at the foot of the throne of God, you will find its waters to be sweet and health-giving. Even the waters of affliction, when they are tasted at the wellhead, are sweet with divine love, but if you follow them along the miry channels of secondary causes and instrumentalities, you will perceive a bitterness in them creating envy, malice, and all uncharitableness within you.

Jacob was, in the expression before us, even bitter towards God. There is not a word like submission in the sentence, nothing of resignation, nothing of confidence. He knew very well that all things came from God, and in effect, he declares that God is in all these things fighting against him. God forbid that these tongues, which owe their power to speak to the great God, should ever pervert their powers to slandering Him, and yet if our tongues have not spoken unbelievably, how often our hearts have done so! We have said, “Why has God dealt thus with me? Why are His strokes so multiplied? And why are my wounds so blue? Oh, wherefore am I thus chastised? Why does He put cross upon cross upon my galled shoulders, and crush me into the dust with heaviness of sorrow?” Peace, child of God, peace. Your Father loves you—love you Him in return, and let your love assure you that it is not possible for

Him to measure out to you a drachm of sorrow more than is needed, nor a grain of bitterness more than your soul absolutely requires for its spiritual health. The exclamation, then, of Jacob was sadly bitter, both towards God and man, if it had not been for unbelief it had never dishonored his lips.

Observe that this speech was *rather carnal than spiritual*. You see more of human affections than of grace-wrought faith, more of the calculator than the believer, more of Jacob than of Israel. Jacob is more the man and less the man of God than we might have expected him to have been. See how he dwells upon his bereavements! “Joseph,” that dear name, as it brought up the beloved Rachel before his mind, wrung the old man’s heart. “Joseph is not.” Alas! that wound was still bleeding.

Then, “Simeon is not,” the reckless, daring, valorous Simeon, is fallen in the stranger’s land. Then, worst of all, Benjamin, the dear name intertwined with the saddest of his funerals—the mother’s Ben-oni and the father’s, “Benjamin,” the last and dearest must be taken away. You see it is the father all through—the loving parent thinking only of his children, the natural affections predominating, but you see nothing here of the grandeur of faith, nothing of the nobility of Job, when he said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Here we meet with no such question as that of the patriarch of Uz, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the LORD? and shall we not also receive evil?”

But Jacob acts like a wayward child, vexed and out of temper, crying against its father, he manifests a petulant spirit, tempted by the natural promptings of the flesh to rebel against God. For awhile the work of the Spirit was beclouded and eclipsed in that venerable man of God, and so, brethren, we also must set ourselves upon our watchtower, lest by any means we suffer even the allowable affections of the flesh to overshadow our spirit and dim the luster of the work of grace.

Jesus wept, and therefore we may weep, sorrow is licensed by the Redeemer’s example. Our Lord was no stoic, and He would not have His people restrain natural emotion, we are bound to sorrow when we are afflicted and chastened of the Lord. But though Jesus wept, He did not murmur; though He sorrowed, yet He did not repine; there is a bound beyond which our mourning must not pass. Jacob might well have said, “Joseph is not, Simeon is a prisoner, and Benjamin is to be taken away from me, the cup is bitter, and if it is possible, O Lord, let it pass from me, nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done,” and then he might have burst into a flood of tears, and there would have been no sin in it at all, but much of sacred tenderness, but he went too far, for his natural affections, instead of taking their proper place, usurped the place in which faith should have sat supreme. He did not merely give his feelings vent, but mastery, he not only wept, but salted his tears with murmuring, and this was an evil thing.

Notice, dear brethren, in the case before us, the patriarch’s unbelieving observation was *quite unwarranted by his past history*. He had been a man of troubles from his youth up. He fled from his father’s house to be an exile, he laid himself down with a stone for his pillow and the hedges for his curtains, but with the angels for his watchers, and did he find the solitude of Luz and the desolation of that lonely place to be against him? Ah! no, he dreamed that matchless dream in which a ladder was set between earth and heaven, and the covenant God appeared to him and made a covenant with him and sent him on his way rejoicing. Could Jacob think of Bethel, and yet say, “All these things are against me”?

And when afterwards, more memorable still, he came back with his wives and those very children over whom he now grieves, did not JEHOVAH preserve him? Could he forget Peniel, and the place where he wrestled and prevailed at the brook Jabbok? An infuriated brother, with a band of four hundred men sworn to take his life, was come to destroy him, and a brother justly incensed, against whom he had done a great wrong, was then close upon him to strike the mother with the children, did Jacob then find that all things were against him? Did not Esau fall upon his neck and kiss him? Did not God deliver His servant? And so again, at Shechem, when the nations of the land would have avenged the blood of the Shechemites who had been so treacherously slain by his sons, did not the Lord bade them touch not His anointed, and do His prophet no harm, and Jacob walked in safety among tribes athirst for his blood.

Thus looking back upon the past and recollecting the covenant which God had made with him, it was not consistent that Jacob should speak as he did. It was congruous with the past to have said, “Out of this difficulty I shall arise, for the Lord is with me.” It was consistent with his past experience for him to have commanded his sons, “Whatsoever the Lord does let us accept it at His hands, for He has not forsaken us in the past, neither will He desert us in days to come.” That would have been faith. But oh! how often you and I forget the steps already trod, and all the mercies which attended them, and fear that God will forsake us and become our enemy.

The Ebenezers which we have raised, do they count for nothing? His love in times past, has that no argument in it for the present and for the future? Will we not say with David, “Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings will I rejoice”? He has been with us in ten troubles, can we not trust Him for the eleventh? We went through fire and water, men did ride over our heads, yet He brought us out into a wealthy place, and set our feet in a large room, and can we not rely upon Him now that new difficulties obstruct our path? Yes, beloved, we will learn from the past, for the lesson of our experience is that the Lord has not forsaken them that trust Him, and they that wait upon Him shall never be ashamed or confounded, world without end.

Still keeping to Jacob’s exclamation, let me observe that it was *altogether erroneous*. Not a syllable that he spoke was absolutely true. “Joseph is not.” And yet, poor Jacob, Joseph is. You think the beasts have devoured him, but he is ruler over all the land of Egypt, and you shall kiss his cheeks ere long. “Simeon is not,” wrong again, good father, for Simeon is alive, though for his good, to cool his hot and headlong spirit Joseph has laid him by the heels a little. He had been much too furious in killing the Shechemites, and in other deeds of blood, and Joseph knows this, and is doing his brother a service that may change his character through life by keeping him a little while in ward. And as to Benjamin, whom you say they wish to take away, he is to go and see his brother Joseph, who longs to embrace him, and will return him to you in peace.

Not one of all these things is against you. Joseph is sent to Egypt to feed you in the famine, and to cherish you in your old age, so as to make your last days your best days, and to keep the house of Israel, and in fact, all the nations of the earth, alive. As for Simeon, good comes out of that, and that is not against you, and as for Benjamin, he shall be preserved to you, and you, too, shall go down and dwell in the land and rejoice exceedingly. Everything is *for* you.

Now, usually our unbelief is a great liar. Our best things are reckoned by unbelief to be our worst. God sends His mercies to us in black envelopes, and we sit down crying over their dismal covering, and dare not open the letter and read the heavenly news written within. The Lord sends His blessings in rumbling wagons, and we are so frightened at the sound as almost to lose the choice contents. Well does the hymn put it—

*“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”*

Our best days have been those which we thought our worst. Probably we are never so much in prosperity as when plunged in adversity. No summer days contribute so much to the healthy growth of our souls as those sharp wintry nights which are so trying to us. We fear that we are being destroyed, and our inner life is at that moment being most effectually preserved. Oh, if we read them aright, all things are for us. We are a thousand fools in one to be caviling at the divine dispensation, and saying, “All these things are against me.” Jacob was wrong in every jot and tittle of what he said, and so usually are we.

Being wrong in judgment, the good old man was *led to unwise acting and speaking*, for he said, “My son shall not go down with you.” He would not yield to his sons, he was determined that Benjamin should not leave him. Simeon he seemed content to leave in prison, although he ought to have sent his

sons back in the hope of bringing their poor brother out of bondage, and he ought to have been willing to run the risk of losing Benjamin rather than to have all the rest of his family die of starvation. But the old man resolutely sets his face, and perhaps stamps his foot, and tells them, “No, never with his consent should Benjamin be trusted with them,” and to this resolve he stands until they are nearly starving, and then he says, “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

The unbelieving generally do stupid things. We conclude that God is against us, and then we act in such a way as to bring troubles upon ourselves which otherwise would not have come. To stand still and see the salvation of God is a grand position for a believing soul, but to run headlong, cloud or no cloud, guide or no guide, is to fall into the ditch, to lose ourselves in the dark woods, and to bring upon ourselves unnumbered ills. Let us take heed of unbelief, since it confuses the judgment and dishonors God.

And notice, once more, that good old Jacob *lived to find in actual experience that he had been wrong from beginning to end*. We do not all live to see what fools we have been, but Jacob did. I wonder, when the wagons came, and he was quite sure they came from Joseph, what he thought of that speech, “All these things are against me”! And when he came to Egypt, and Joseph came to meet him, and they fell upon each other’s necks, I wonder whether it did not half choke him to think, “I once said, ‘All these things are against me’”!

When the old soul went tottering about the land of Goshen, leaning on his staff, with his mind full of all the glory of his darling Joseph, when he was enjoying a brilliant old age at last, when he saw day by day how Joseph was honored, and how great he was, I think he must often have sought out a little corner to weep in, and to confess, “Lord, how wicked was I to say, ‘All these things are against me,’ when I have lived to see You dealing with me with a Father’s tenderness, and with the wisdom and loving-kindness of a gracious God.”

If we are not in this world permitted to see the good results of all our troubles, at any rate we shall behold them in the next, and if such things as tears of joy will be allowed on the other side of the river, some of us will shed abundance of them. Oh! if regrets might mingle there, how we shall regret that we rashly anticipated the results of divine action and were so unwise as to misinterpret the Master’s mind. At any rate, we will string our harps to noble tunes, and this shall be the part of our celestial minstrelsy, “The Lord lives, and blessed be our Rock who out of much tribulation has brought His servants, and through their tribulation has helped them to obtain the victory, and to enter into their eternal rest.” Thus much upon the exclamation of unbelief, higher themes await us.

II. Turn now to the thirty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, and the sixteenth verse, where you have THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE.

“O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.”

Unbelief says, “All these things are against me,” enlightened experience says, “In all these things is the life of my spirit.” The passage is taken from the prayer of Hezekiah after he was raised from his sick bed. He describes the bitterness of his soul, and his chattering like the crane or the swallow, but he comes to the conclusion that all these trials and afflictions, and approaches to the gates of the grave, made up the life of mortal men, and that by them the life of their spirit is sub-served.

Beloved, this is a great and instructive truth. Our spirits, under God, live by passing through the sorrows of the present, for first let me remind you, that by these trials and afflictions we live, because *they are medicinal*. There are spiritual diseases which would corrupt our spirit if not checked, kept down, and destroyed as to their reigning power by the daily cross which the Lord lays upon our shoulders. Just as the fever must be held in check by the bitter draught of quinine, so must the bitter cup of affliction rebuke our rising pride and worldliness. We should exalt ourselves above measure, and provoke the Lord to jealousy against us, were it not that trouble lays us low.

None of us shall know, until we read our biography in the light of heaven, from what inbred sins, foul corruptions, damnable uncleanness, and detestable lusts we have been delivered, by being driven again and again along the fiery road of affliction. Adversities are the sharp knives with which God does

cut from us the deadly ulcers of our sins, these are the two-edged swords with which He slays our enemies and His own which lurk within us. He must prune us, and trim us as the gardener his trees, otherwise we shall bring forth no fruit. Hence by all these things which Jacob declared to be against him, we find the life of our spirit wisely protected.

Afflictions, again, are *stimulative*. We are all apt to grow slothful. I know not whether it be so with all believers, but we of gross and bilious temperament find ourselves oppressed by the spirit of slumbering, but personal sickness, or relative grief (which is sharper still), or serious pecuniary losses, these things stir our sluggish blood, and make our hearts beat at a healthier rate.

There is an old story in the Greek annals, of a soldier under Antigonus who had a disease about him, an extremely painful one, likely to bring him soon to the grave. Always first in the ranks was this soldier, and in the hottest part of the fray, he was always to be seen leading the van, the bravest of the brave, because his pain prompted him to fight that he might forget it, he feared not death because he knew that in any case he had not long to live. Antigonus, who greatly admired the valor of his soldier, finding out that he suffered from a disease, had him cured by one of the most eminent physicians of the day, but alas! from that moment the warrior was absent from the front of the battle. He now sought his ease, for, as he remarked to his companions, he had something worth living for—health, home, family, and other comforts, and he would not risk his life now as aforetime.

So when our troubles are many, we are made courageous in serving our God, we feel that we have nothing to live for in this world, and we are driven by hope of the world to come, to exhibit zeal, self-denial, and industry, but how often is it otherwise in better times? For then the joys and pleasures of this world make it hard for us to remember the world to come, and we sink into inglorious ease. Master, we thank You for our griefs, for they have quickened us. We bless You for winds and waves, for these have driven us away from treacherous shores. Before we were afflicted we went astray, but now have we kept Your Word.

Trials and troubles touch the life of our spirit because their endurance is strengthening. They have the same effect upon the spiritual man as athletic exercises upon the wrestlers of old. If men would win honor in the Greek games, they denied themselves all luxuries, and passed through severe ordeals, by which their sinews and muscles were developed, and so the Lord puts His children through severe training that He may develop their manhood, that their patience may learn to endure hardness, that their faith may learn steadfastness. Rough winds root the oaks, so our afflictions confirm us in the promises of God. We had been babes forever, and never have been able to walk alone, if the Lord had not put us on our feet and allowed us to fall again and again, but each time to rise stronger, acquiring the art of walking by our bruised and broken knees.

Our troubles are a great *educational* process. We are at school now and are not yet fully instructed. What little we know we scarcely know, and what we have learned is so little that we are most of us only in our A, B, C's, yet, we cannot read words of one syllable, and it is right that we should continue at school till we are made fit to enter into the loftier company beyond the stars.

Now, who learns so well anywhere as on the sick bed, or in the midst of tribulation? I tell you, sirs, there are days in a man's life when he learns more in an hour than in seventy years of ease. I shall not give instances, but there have been such days for some of us of late, and may the Lord make us wiser thereby! Blessed is the man who is thus corrected and instructed, to whom the Master opens up the Word, and the heart, and the promise, by fire-light shed from the furnace. The rod is a great teacher. I do not know whether boys always need the rod to make them learn, but I am sure men do, and some of us have skin so thick that we need to be smitten every day. As David puts it, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," as if he never began the day without his whipping, and never passed through without a repetition of the scourging. We must take up our cross daily if we would be disciples of Jesus.

So, too, trials and tribulations are the life of our spirit, because they are *preparative* for that higher life in which the spirit shall truly live. Jacob would hardly have been fit for the luxury of Egypt if he had

not been trained by his griefs. That happy period before his death, in which he dwelt in perfect ease and peace, at the close of which, leaning upon his staff, he bore such a blessed testimony to the faithfulness of God—he would not have been fit to enjoy it, it would have been disastrous to him if he had not been prepared for it by the sorrows of Succoth.

So we shall be made meet to be partakers in the inheritance in light by traversing the wilderness before reaching the promised land. This is the place for washing our robes—yonder is the place for wearing them; this is the place for tuning our harps, and discord is inevitable to that work, but yonder is the abode of unbroken harmony. We fret and grieve and vex ourselves today, but by and by we shall rest in happiness unbroken. Let us have courage, the end will more than repay us for the toil of the means, and the rest shall make up for the labor of the way. Be of good comfort, and instead henceforth of concluding that outward trials are against you, agree with Hezekiah in this wise sentence, “By these things men live.”

Let me only detain you one minute, to ask you whether, in looking back upon your life, you are not compelled to feel that the best parts of your character have been produced in you by your troubles? Have not your noblest actions been wrought by you in adversity? You had not been today what you are, nor where you are, nor on the road to heaven as you now are, if you had not been afflicted. How much we owe to the anvil and the hammer! Would you alter your trials now if you could? You would have arranged your lot very differently sometime ago, but would you now? Even at this distance, too short to get the full perspective, and to understand it thoroughly, would you have your life changed? I know you say devoutly, “Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; every dark and bending line has met in the center of immutable love.”

Well, then, if it has been so until now, do you think the Lord is about to change? Do you imagine that He gives His best first? Is it not always His rule to keep the best wine until the last! Oh, how it has cheered and comforted me of late to think that I have always found my God to be most good to me, and if possible, amid many sharp trials, He seems to have been better, and more kind and gracious to me of late than at the first, and so it shall be to the end. He cannot alter. He cannot deny Himself. So let us sweep the furrows from our brow and wipe the tears from our eyes. Jesus goes before us, and the Spirit is with us. All things shall *not* be against us, but in them all shall be the life of our spirit, and our lasting good shall be the outgrowth of all.

III. I close with my third text, and I think you may almost guess it, it tells of THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

Turn now to the eighth chapter of Romans, and the thirty-seventh verse.

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

“All these things are against us.” Very well, we could not conquer them if they were not against us, but they are the life of our spirit—and as Samson found honey in the lion, so we, though these things roar upon us, shall find food within them. Trials threaten our death, but they promote our life. I want you to be sure to notice the uniform expression, “*All these things* are against us.” “*In all these things* is the life of my spirit,” and now, “*in all these things* we are more than conquerors.” The list is just as comprehensive in the best text as in the worst. Nay, poor Jacob’s, “All these things” only referred to three, but look at Paul’s list, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—the list is longer, darker, blacker, fiercer, sterner, but still we triumph—“In all these things we are more than conquerors.”

Observe then, that the believing Christian enjoys present triumph over all his troubles. It is not, “We shall be more than conquerors,” but “*We are.*” “*We are* today.” As afflictions come we conquer them, and before they come we overcome them. Over anticipated trouble faith wins a glorious victory. She believes that when trial comes it shall work her good, and so the bitterness thereof is gone forever, swallowed up in victory. When the trial comes she meets it as a conquered enemy, and after it is over she looks upon it as what she did foreknow, for she counted it not a strange thing when the fiery trial overtook her.

We *are* conquerors, brethren and sisters, at this very hour. We often talk of the crown which we are to wear, but we *are* kings and priests unto our God even now. He has crowned us with loving-kindness and tender mercies. We say, “One day, thank God, I shall be able to rejoice in these troubles,” but faith rejoices in them now. We rejoice in deep distress, leaning on all-sufficient grace. To come out of the furnace and walk calmly is nothing, but to walk in the furnace with the Son of God, this is the miracle. To sing after you have left the bed of pain is nothing, but to sing God’s highest praises on the bed of sickness is the music that glorifies Him, and by faith we mean to excel in it.

It is no small thing to see the dearest one you have on earth smitten before you, and yet to bless the Lord, and when adversity comes, still to praise Him, and when sickness follows, still to let the note rise higher, and when death draws near, to lift the song yet more on high, and be more exultant still. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” I tell you, the praise God receives from His poor bereaved or sick children is much sweeter than anything which ascends from angels, from cherubim and seraphim. Who would not praise the Master when He scatters liberally His daily favors?

The devil found an opportunity for speaking against Job from that very thing. He said, “Does Job fear God for nought? Have you not set a hedge about him, and all that he has? But put forth now your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” And God is so pleased with the praise He gets from His children when their bone and flesh are touched, that He said, “He is in your hand, only spare his life.” What glorious music it was when Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” It rolled up into JEHOVAH’S ear with a sweetness such as cherubim and seraphim never could have yielded. What a glorious conqueror Job was in the very midst of his worst griefs! It was not that he received twice as much as before—that was not the greatest triumph. The triumph was that while in adversity he said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.” May we have such faith as that, to be now, “in all these things more than conquerors.”

What does Paul mean by saying that believers are more than conquerors? Is it not this, that with the conqueror there is a time when his triumph is in jeopardy? But it is never so with the believer, he grasps the victory at once by an act of faith. No “ifs,” “buts,” “peradventures,” for him. He is conqueror at once, for God is on his side. A conqueror, too, who wins by a battle, and suffers by the battle. He has to endure wounds, and toil, and faintness, but by all our troubles we are not sufferers but gainers. It is not merely the reward of the suffering which is good, but the suffering itself works patience, and patience experience.

Brethren, if a wise Christian had his choice, he would not choose the silken joys of prosperity and uninterrupted happiness, because such a thing is poverty, but our sufferings and griefs, and losses, and crosses, bring with them inevitably through divine grace an abundant wealth. I hear some brethren rejoicing that perhaps the Lord will come, and therefore they will not die. I would sooner die, had I my choice. I see no comfort in the hope of not dying. “They that are alive and remain shall not prevent them that are asleep,” they shall not have preference over them that die. And indeed it is written, “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” So that some kind of priority is even allotted to the dead in Christ.

If I die not I shall have lost what thousands will have who die, namely, actual fellowship with Christ in the grave. Let me have it, let me have it, my sweet Lord, let me wear the clay-cold shape of death that once was Yours, and sleep within the sepulcher as You did. To die and rise again, and be with You forever, is to complete the circle of the perfect. Those who think that to be alive when He comes will be so great a glory, will perhaps find it no such great thing compared with death and resurrection in the likeness of the Lord Jesus. As the warrior of the olden time dreaded peace and longed for the garment rolled in blood, so may the believers rejoice in afflictions. As before the engagement the captain stimulates his soldiers by reminding them that “the sterner the warfare the greater the honor,” even so may we nerve our spirits.

“Gentlemen in England now abed will think themselves accursed that they were not here and hold their valor cheap that went not with us on this glorious day”—so spoke the hero, and so let us also welcome persecution and tribulation. We would hold ourselves defrauded of honor if we avoided tribulation, we should look upon ourselves as being so far impoverished for eternity in being spared affliction upon earth. Up yonder to relate the triumphs of grace in us, to tell of the faithfulness of God in poverty and affliction, to make known to principalities and powers forever the wonderful and eternal love of God, as we have discovered it in the furnace and amidst the flames, this will be everlasting wealth, for which we may be grateful now that God is putting us in the way of gaining it. So that in these things we are more than conquerors, since to the conqueror it is a disadvantage to fight, but to us even the fight itself is an advantage over and above the victory.

But see how this last text of mine opens up the great source of comfort. “We are more than conquerors *through him that loved us*.” Did you notice, Jacob said nothing about Him that loved us? No, he could not have been unbelieving if he had thought of Him, and the life of our spirit in trouble very much lies in remembering Him that loved us. It is through Him we conquer because He has conquered. I think I see Him at this instant wearing the crown of thorns, His hands still ruby with the marks of the nails, and His heart all opened with the spear gash, and He says to me and to His servants, “Children, I am with you. You are filling up in your bodies that which is behind of My sufferings for My body’s sake, which is the church. Be conformed to Me. Ask patience, and I will give it you, ask the Spirit’s help, and you shall receive it, and after you have suffered awhile you shall be with Me where I am, to behold My glory.”

Brethren, here is our joy indeed. Now the furnace grows cool, for He is at our side. The lake of trouble tossed with tempest becomes a sheet of glass, for He walks the billows, and we hear Him say, “It is I.” The winds are hushed, and the coolest, softest zephyrs fan our cheeks while yet again He says, “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me.” “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you.” “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” The Lord bless you, my tried brethren, in *all these things*, for His name’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 54.

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